

THE CASTES AND TRIBES OF SOUTHERN INDIA.¹

THIS, if not quite the most workmanlike, may justly claim to be the most voluminous contribution to the publications of the Ethnographical Survey of India. The facts for which Mr. Thurston is personally responsible were collected in a series of tours throughout the Madras Presidency, in which he was able to combine the collection of specimens for the museum under his charge with a considerable amount of original work. He gives a lively account of the difficulties which he experienced in examining and measuring the shy jungle folk in whom he was most deeply interested; and the combined tact and enthusiasm with which he conducted these inquiries deserve hearty recognition. With his own personal investigations he has combined contributions from other writers, among whom the work of Mr. F. Fawcett, much of which is already familiar to students of the periodical bulletins of the Madras Museum, is the most valuable. To these have been added numerous extracts from census reports, district manuals, and similar literature; and the large series of excellent photographs adds largely to the interest and value of the work.

It is, however, to be regretted that, apparently from pressure of other duties, Mr. Thurston has been unable to arrange this great mass of material in a form suited to the needs of students. The articles contain much undigested material, and little has been done to classify this in a series of well-ordered paragraphs, each provided with a marginal heading, and bringing together the accounts of tribal organisation, domestic ceremonies, religious beliefs, and the like. It is obvious that the bulk of the work might have been much reduced by judicious compression; and, as native States like Mysore and Cochin are engaged in ethnographical surveys of their own population, it was unnecessary to give more than references to their preliminary bulletins. There is nothing in the shape of a subject-index; and though a good start was made by Mr. W. Francis in his report on the census of 1901 to compile a bibliography of the literature of the subject, Mr. Thurston has done nothing to supplement it. A protest must also be made against the habit of the writer, which has already greatly impaired the value of his useful "Ethnographic Notes on Southern India," published four years ago, of giving in the notes merely the names of his authorities without precise references. This gives a slovenly appearance to the work which it otherwise does not deserve.

We might also have expected from the author an exposition of his views on the prehistoric ethnology of the province. The Dravidian question is always with us, and though he supplies some facts which may assist in its solution, his personal views on the subject are nowhere definitely stated; and he seems to have abandoned in despair any attempt to indicate how far the existing jungle tribes are related to that remarkable people who reared the great series of megalithic monuments which abound on the Nilgiri plateau, the relics from which, excavated by Mr. Breeds and others, form the most interesting collection in the museum under his charge. Two important facts, however, can be gathered from his notes on the physical characteristics of the people; first, that the primitive Negrito element is not so widely distributed as some authorities have assumed. It is not

apparent among the Kotas and Badagas, who seem to be later immigrants into the hill country from the plains, and it is found only among the more primitive tribes, like the Irulas and Kurumbas. Even among them it is important to note that prognathism and wooliness of hair appear as aberrant characters. In the second place, when we speak of the Dravidian head form, we must remember that it is not consistently uniform throughout the Presidency. Whatever may be the causes of this variance of type—the influence of environment or miscegenation—about which Mr. Thurston, with his characteristic caution, declines to express an opinion, it is certain that the type in the northern district is subbrachycephalic or mesaticephalic, while it is only in the Tamil and Malayalim countries that we find it to be dolicho- or subdolichocephalic.

The chief interest in the ethnography of southern India lies in the startling variances of culture which appear throughout the population. For an example of what is apparently the lowest type, we may turn to the Yānādis, a dark-skinned, platyrhine, under-



FIG. 1.—Toda Woman. From "Castes and Tribes of Southern India."

sized tribe inhabiting the Telugu country. Their religion is a crude form of animism; they make fire by friction; eat their food almost raw, merely scorching or warming the flesh of the animals which they kill; and yet, with the curious inconsistency which pervades the Hindu social system, they are regarded by the higher classes as gentlemen of the forest, are allowed to draw water from wells used by high-caste people, and may carry it to Brahmins. In direct contrast to them we may refer to the Nāyādis, a tribe in the plains little higher in culture than the Yānādis, who live by collecting jungle products, and are regarded as so impure that in their begging rounds they are compelled to stand at a distance from respectable houses, and to make their appeals for charity in stentorian tones.

A higher type of culture is reached in the Badagas, the agriculturists of the hills, where the pastoral element is represented by the Todas, and the industrial

¹"The Castes and Tribes of Southern India." By Edgar Thurston, assisted by K. Rangachari. Vol. i., A and B. Pp. lxxvii+397. Vol. ii., C—J. Pp. 521. Vol. iii., K. Pp. 522. Vol. iv., K—M. Pp. 501. Vol. v., M—P. Pp. 487. Vol. vi., P—S. Pp. 458. Vol. vii., T—Z. Pp. 439. (Madras: Government Press, 1909.)

by the Kotas. Mr. Thurston's account of these people forms one of the best articles in his work. They live in dread of the more savage Kurumbas, by origin

non-Aryan tribes, who were regarded as quite outside the pale of orthodoxy. The result was twofold. In the first place, the line of distinction between the Brahman and the outcast was more clearly marked than in the north; and, secondly, south Indian Brahmanism, affected by its environment, and saved from the disturbing influences of cataclysms to which it was exposed in north India from the successive invasions of foreign tribes like Scythians, Huns, and Mongols, was permitted to develop on lines peculiar to itself, and thus assumed a character very different from that which it displays in the Panjab, the Gangetic Valley, and the Delta of Bengal.

The special characteristics of south Indian Brahmanism are most effectively illustrated by Mr. Fawcett's excellent account of the Nambutiris of Malabar, with their intense craving after what they deem personal purity, their elaborate system of tabus, and their placid, reflective life spent in an endless round of elaborate ceremonial and devotion to the study of the Sanskrit Scriptures. In these respects they hold a position unique among the Brahmins of India, and the remarkable phase of

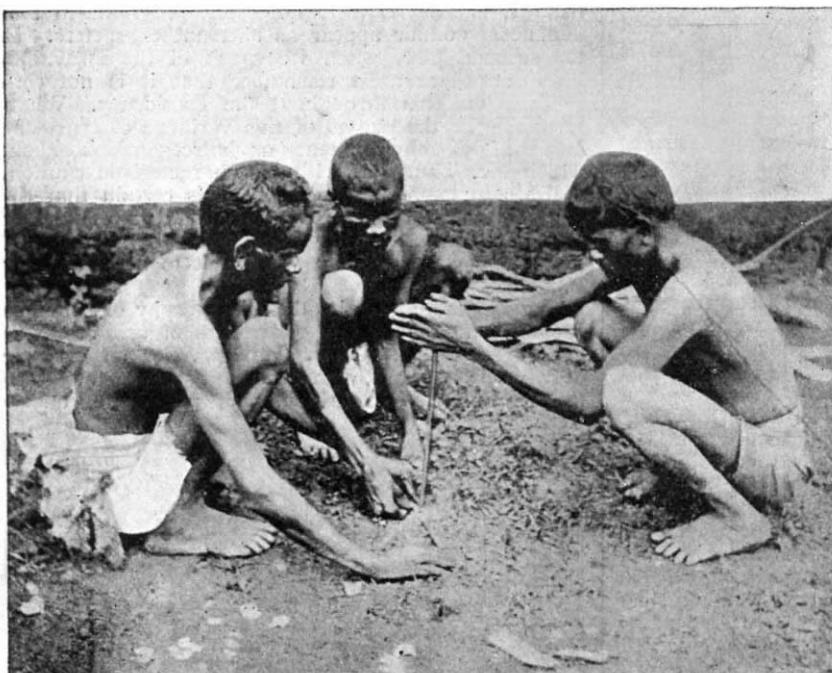


FIG. 2.—Nayādis making Fire. From "Castes and Tribes of Southern India."

Negritos, who, like many other secluded races, are supposed to possess the power of necromancy. Every Badaga family pays them a sort of retaining fee in the shape of an annual tax and special dues at funeral and pregnancy rites, in return for which the Kurumba is bound to treat cases of diabolical possession or of the evil eye by means of appropriate spells. But the Kurumba needs to be cautious in exercising these uncanny powers, for instances are quoted of cases in which he has been suspected of unfair dealing, and "his hut is surrounded at night, and the entire household massacred in cold blood and their houses set on fire."

At the head of the social system stand the Brahman and the Toda. The entry of both into the social system of south India is comparatively modern. Mr. Lewis Rice, in his recent summary of the epigraphical evidence from Mysore and Coorg, finds that there is no record of Brahmins in those regions before the second century of our era; and other authorities, like that great scholar, the late Dr. Burnell, fix their migration from the north at even a later date. This fact accounts for two interesting characteristics of religious and social life. The Brahman being a newcomer, and not, as in northern India, evolved from the family priests of the invading tribes from Central Asia, reached the south with all his tabus and restrictions well established, and these were intensified by contact with the

religious and social life illustrated by them deserves attentive study.

Even more interesting is that remarkable race, the Todas. Mr. Thurston has wisely referred his readers

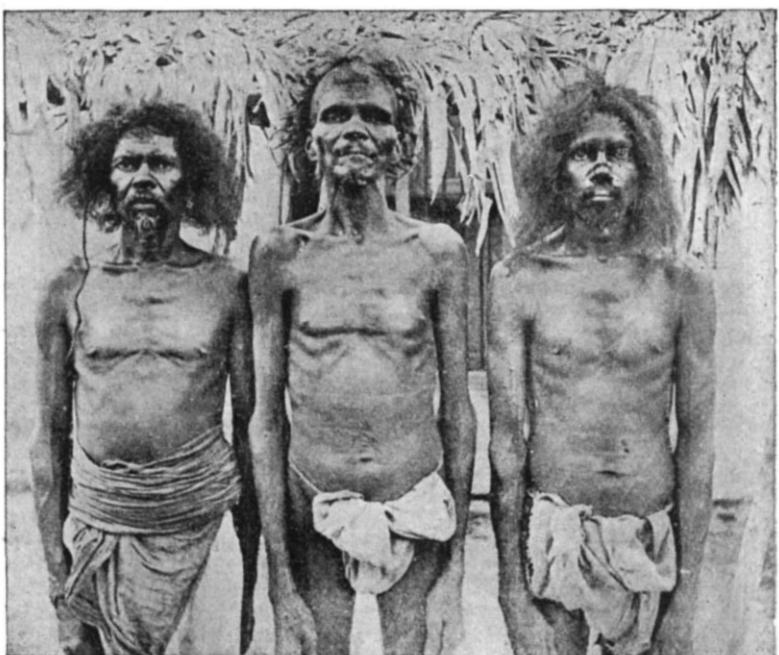


FIG. 3.—Yānādis. From "Castes and Tribes of Southern India."

to the exhaustive monograph on this tribe by Dr. W. H. R. Rivers, an excellent example of the successful application of the intensive methods of study

applied to one of the smaller groups. Mainly on the ground of the exceptional hairiness observable in the Nambutiri Brahmans, he is inclined to accept the brilliant suggestion made by Dr. Rivers from a study of their emigrations preserved by the tribe, that the Todas are comparatively new arrivals in the Nilgiri plateau, and that they are connected in race with the Malabar group of Brahmans. Mr. Thurston records a curious fact which escaped the observation of Dr. Rivers, that their extreme reverence for the herd of sacred buffaloes is shown by the rule that when the animals are driven from one grazing ground to another, the women of the tribe are not permitted to tread upon the track of the holy beasts, but must be lifted over it by the men of the tribe.

In spite of the imperfections in the literary arrangement of his work, to which we have directed attention, Mr. Thurston's volumes constitute a monumental record of varied phases of south Indian tribal life, the traditions, manners, and customs of the people. Though in some respects it may be corrected or supplemented by future research, it will long retain its value as an example of out-of-door investigation, and will remain a veritable mine of information, which will be of value to his fellow-officers in acquiring a knowledge of the people, and a storehouse from which the armchair ethnologist will draw abundant facts of the highest value and interest.

A HISTORY OF BIRDS.¹

OF the series of four volumes to be published under the title of "Animal Life: an Evolutionary Natural History," the editor, Mr. Pycraft, has himself contributed that on birds. The reader will at once be struck by two facts, first, that the subject is treated from the point of view of the evolutionist, as opposed to that of the systematist, and, secondly, that the author is never satisfied until he has inquired into, and, if possible, explained, the various phenomena that meet the eye of the ornithologist. As he tells us in his preface, and as we gather from the excellent introduction by Sir Ray Lankester, which practically summarises the whole work, the study of birds is here presented as one of living organisms, moulded in part by an inherent constitution, and in part by the struggle for existence.

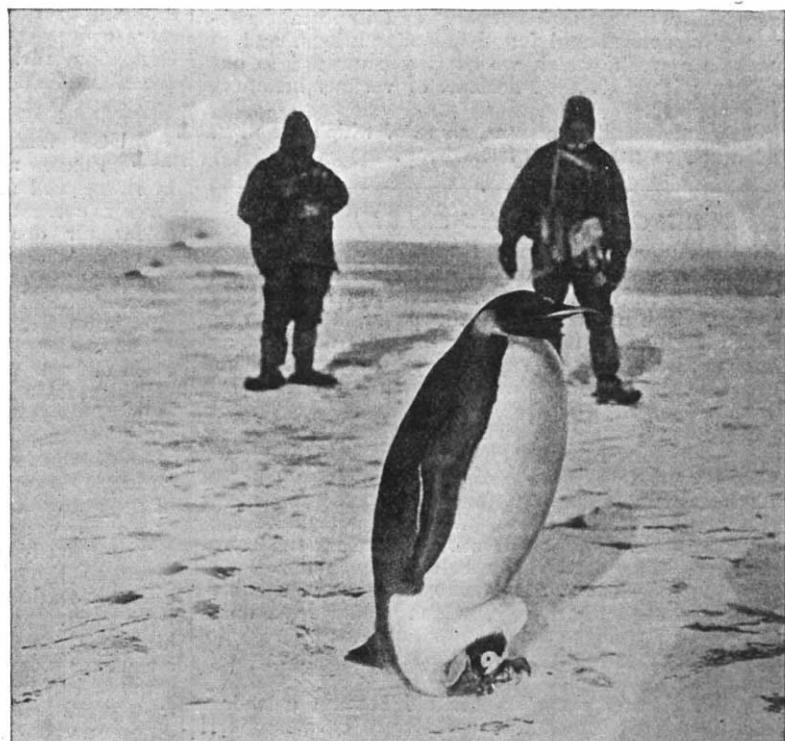
A great array of facts is marshalled in order before us, and presented in attractive fashion, while Mr. Pycraft's well-known skill is particularly evident in the osteology and pterygraphy; but we must confess that he seems to us somewhat hard upon the "field-naturalist," the results of whose labours he terms "a pitifully small gain to science." It is true that such an one often lacks the training or opportunity necessary for scientific research, but his province is more especially to supply material for the work of his fellows, and must never forget that Darwin and Wallace—not to mention later instances—were essentially field-naturalists.

¹ "A History of Birds," By W. P. Pycraft. With an introduction by Sir Ray Lankester, K.C.B., F.R.S. Pp. xxx+458. (London: Methuen and Co., 1910.) Price 10s. 6d. net.

The volume begins with a brief but sufficient summary of the general structure of birds, and proceeds to consider their phylogeny, their relationship to reptiles, and their development from climbing arboreal forms to those endowed with full powers of flight. The writer's views on this part of the subject are clearly shown by a "genealogical tree," while a wood-cut is given of one of the hypothetical primitive types, or pro-aves.

From the ancestral forms of birds we pass on to a sketch of their present distribution and of the generally accepted zoogeographical regions. Mr. Pycraft accepts the theory that the entire class originated in the northern hemisphere, with the possible exception of the Sphenisci; but the close connection of the latter in his tree of descent with the decidedly northern Colymbi seems to run counter to this contention.

Environment and its effects next come under dis-



Emperor Penguin brooding its Young. From "A History of Birds."

cussion, with selected examples of adaptation to the surroundings. Here we find the view definitely adopted that a moist atmosphere leads to darker pigmentation and a dry atmosphere to lighter tints, but we are not inclined to follow our author implicitly here without further proof.

Migration is always an interesting subject, and we concur with Mr. Pycraft in paying little attention to very precise "lines of flight"; whether, however, he is right in holding that the trend of migration is due north and south, apart from physical obstructions, is a much more debatable question.

The interrelations of birds and other animals, and their connections with plants, form the subject-matter of three well-written chapters, while an account of the relations between the sexes is not only instructive in itself, but naturally leads us on to the theory of sexual selection. The "displays" of various species, the pugnacity of the males, and so forth, are set forth at due length; but, on the whole, our author minimises